

Wednesday, March 16, 2005

Health Commissioner: Smoking impacts many

A message from Indiana State Health Commissioner Judy Monroe, M.D.



Many of you saw the newspaper article announcing my appointment as the new state

health commissioner.

The picture in the paper included my 83-year-old mother. She was thrilled to be invited to the Governor's office for the occasion. What a big day for her!

My mother lives independently, and when she comes to my home she jumps right in to help with household chores.

She takes daily walks, eats mod-

erately, and enjoys challenging her mind with games and puzzles.

You would never know that she was a victim of polio in 1952, along with 20,000 other U.S. citizens that year.

The polio vaccine was introduced in 1955 and is a great public health success story.

My father did not live to see my appointment. He did not live to see me graduate from medical school or residency. He never met my husband and never knew my three children.

My father was a heavy smoker; as a child, I begged him to quit.

As a teenager I was fearful when

he underwent one of the first open heart surgeries performed in Dayton, Ohio. During my junior year of medical school, I received a call early Father's Day morning that my dad had passed away from a massive heart attack at the age of 61.

Smoking is a public health threat.

We do not have a vaccine to prevent smoking like we do for polio. However, we do have support and programs to help folks quit.

If you smoke, please consider quitting - for your health and for public health, but especially for your family and friends.

ISDH staff tracking state's pertussis cases

Photo by Julie Fletcher



Indiana State Department of Health employees have been busy tracking cases of pertussis, a bacterial disease. Shown here is (left to right) Karol Baker, public health investigator; Wayne Staggs, epidemiologist; and Mily Jines, public health investigator.

Wayne Staggs, Indiana State Department of Health epidemiologist, and his staff have been extremely busy since last summer tracking cases of pertussis throughout Indiana.

Also known as whooping cough, pertussis is a bacterial disease that is highly contagious and spread through coughing and sneezing.

According to Staggs, Indiana is following a nationwide trend this year of an increase in cases. Half of those cases, he said, have occurred in those 10 years of age and older and another 21 percent in infants under one year of age.

"In 2004, there were more cases reported in Indiana than since

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Helpline offers statewide resources

The 12-member staff of the Indiana State Department of Health's Indiana Family Helpline offers a wealth of information to those in need of assistance.

The simple 1-800-433-0746 toll-free phone number links individuals to more than 8,600 Indiana service agencies and providers – anything from dental care, prenatal care, food, shelter, and Hoosier

Healthwise providers to HIV/STD counseling and testing.

According to Mary Bisbecos, supervisor, the telephone-based Indiana Family Helpline was designed to assist in promoting maternal and child health services like Women, Infants and Childrens (WIC) services, and to support



Indiana Family Helpline staff members Jason Decker and Anna Orozco discuss a call. Photo by Dan Axler

other programs and services statewide.

“Our services are very important,” said Bisbecos. “There are people that have such needs and some are in dilemmas and don’t know where to turn.”

The Indiana Family Helpline was created in 1988 as a fed-

eral mandate of the Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, said Bisbecos. “At that time, the Helpline was staffed by two individuals,” she said, adding that she was one of them.

Located on the seventh floor at ISDH’s 2 North Meridian location, staff with the Helpline responded to 28,115 incoming calls in 2004.

The communication specialists (those answering the calls) also made 1,210 advocacy calls – calls made with permission on behalf of the caller to service providers – and made 58,763 referrals to programs.

Those calls – some coming from out-of-state family members – can

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ISDH hosts food security tabletop exercise

The Indiana State Department of Health hosted a first-of-its-kind food security tabletop exercise earlier this month.

The exercise, which was conducted in Indianapolis, was the first food security tabletop exercise to focus on the food processing industry.

It was sponsored by the Indiana State Department of Health and facilitated by private sector consultants from The Uriah Group.

In a tabletop exercise, participants are presented with a mock scenario and are then asked to discuss among themselves how they would respond to the situation.

The goal is to learn about the procedures and capabilities of other organizations and to identify challenges or problems that could

potentially develop in an actual event.

In this exercise, participants simulated an incident involving the deliberate contamination of a food commodity, which had been committed during processing and had gone undetected.

More than 100 participants from several government agencies, the private sector and academia shared plans, procedures, and ideas with each other as they worked through the scenario.



They discussed how their organizations would respond during different phases of the event, from the initial threat through the recovery phase.

“We did this exercise to test ourselves in the event we would actually have a serious situation as

we did that day (in the mock scenario),” said ISDH Food Protection Program Manager Scott Gilliam. “We were trying to see how well we could act and respond to the situation.”

Because this was a first-of-its-kind event, plans call for the results of the exercise to eventually be

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Challenge from leadership: Increase physical activity

As we welcome Judy Monroe, M.D. as our new state health commissioner, I would like to draw special attention to the fact that our new top leadership, both at the StateHouse and 2 N. Meridian St., have placed healthy lifestyles, particularly increased physical activity, as high priorities for improving the health of Indiana.

I think you will also find it exciting to see that our new leaders not only speak of the value of physical activity, they model that behavior as well. Governor Daniels and the First Lady in particular have taken on an ambitious physical activity regimen that should inspire all Hoosiers.

As we in public health are so

intimately aware, physical activity greatly maintains and improves both health and quality of life for ourselves and those around us. It betters performance and makes our state more competitive.

The fact that the busiest among us have successfully integrated regular physical activity into their daily lives is inspiring.

The Governor's Council for Physical Fitness and Sports has planned several events for the spring and summer aimed at recruiting more Hoosiers to be active everyday.

The Circle City Dribble is a dribbling parade of 2005 participants through downtown Indy in conjunction with the 2005 NCAA

Women's Final Four. The Governor's Family Fitness Open House, to take place at T.C. Howe Academy on May 7, 2005, will showcase successful programs and activities around the region.

Finally, you will be excited to know that Governor Daniels' Sports Spot will be debuted at this year's Black and Minority Health Fair and the 2005 Indiana State Fair, where the full basketball court and promotions will return.

Our leaders have challenged us, the leaders of public health in our state, to join them in modeling healthy behaviors to the citizens of Indiana. I hope that you will join me in accepting that challenge.

— Eric Neuburger

Keynote speakers announced for Rural Health Conference

The Indiana Rural Health Association (IRHA) announced the keynote speakers for its 8th annual IRHA Conference at the French Lick Springs Resort, June 8 to 10, 2005.

Headlining the event will be Dr. Marcia Brand, director of the Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Service Administration, and Indiana Lieutenant Governor Becky Skillman.

Dr. Brand will open the conference on June 8 with "Translating the Quality Agency into Everyday Practice."

Lt. Gov. Skillman will close the conference on June 10 with "Rural Health: The View from the Statehouse."



Indiana State Health Commissioner Judy Monroe, M.D. will also be speaking at the conference.

The theme of this year's conference is "Rural Health: Our Future in Our Hands."

The IRHA is a not-for-profit organization representing a diverse statewide membership consisting of individuals and organizations committed to the improvement of health and resources for rural Hoosiers. For more information, visit www.indianaruralhealth.org.

Food

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made available as a training module for industry, other states, and local jurisdictions across the nation to use in heightening awareness of food security issues.

Additionally, ISDH's two full-time Food Defense Program Coordinators will continue their efforts to increase food security levels in Indiana through educational programs and assisting food industry officials in identifying and minimizing their operations' vulnerabilities.

"This valuable and reusable training exercise was the culmination of months of planning and organizing," said Gilliam. "We are pleased to have been able to provide a forum and scenario for stakeholders to interactively resolve issues that would surface in a crisis of this nature."

— Andy Zirkle & Mark Mattox

Cases

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1964. Nationwide, the numbers are up also,” said Staggs.

In the U.S., approximately 20,000 cases were reported in 2004, which is the most in almost 50 years.

Additionally, he said, 2005 figures currently reflect 63 cases as of March 11. Compare that to the six cases reported at the same time last year. But, Staggs pointed out, last year the increase in cases, or outbreak, began in July and has continued into 2005.

According to Staggs, Hamilton County is currently the “hot spot” with 12 cases. Last year, St. Joseph County reported the most cases of 103.

The increase, said Staggs, is due to an increase in diagnosed cases. “We’ve seen more awareness and recognition, more diagnosis, more testing, and more reporting,” he said.

When a report is received by the ISDH or local health department, that is the point the Immunization Program staff steps in.

Did you know that in Indiana it is recommended that children receive four doses of DTaP vaccine before the age of 18 months? This protects against tetanus, diphtheria, as well as pertussis.

This series of shots is 80 to 85 percent effective in protecting against pertussis, but cannot be given at this time to anyone seven years or older.

“After the physicians report a diagnosis to our office, our field staff follow up with the doctor, the patient, and any persons who may have been exposed to the case” said Staggs.

Such investigations include confirming what symptoms were reported and when they occurred, and finding out the names of others who may have been exposed to the infected person.

Those people, he said, may also be treated with specific antibiotics, depending on the severity of the exposure.

At times, even daycares and schools are involved.

The six ISDH field investigators often putting in extra hours to track pertussis include Karee Solek, Karol Baker, Thomas Keller, David Ellsworth, Simon Korazemo, and Mily Jines.

Assistance has also been provided by the local health department staff in the affected counties.

Because pertussis is a reportable disease, the compiled information is sent weekly to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC analyzes the data to monitor the trends in age, race and ethnicity, among other epidemiological factors.

Helpline

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last anywhere from a few minutes to forty minutes depending on the complexity of the case. Bilingual staff (provided by the Indiana Perinatal Network) are available, as well as other language services. Approximately 75 to 100 incoming calls are handled daily.

The Helpline is available Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., and voicemail is available after hours, on holidays, and on weekends. The peak hours, said Bisbecos, are from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. – lunch hour for most working individuals.

While the Helpline provides

information and referrals on an extensive list of services, it is also a valuable resource during health emergencies, outbreaks, or other situations.

For instance, during the flu shot shortage late last year, the Helpline hosted two nurses who answered the onslaught of calls.

“We had 300 plus calls in one day,” said Bisbecos.

An increase in calls was also seen during the anthrax scare in October 2001.

While the staff does not have medical or legal backgrounds, they receive specialized training to respond to the wide range of

callers’ needs. Bisbecos said that working on the Helpline does take a certain type of individual.

“It takes someone dedicated, someone who cares, and someone that has life experiences who gives them empathy,” said Bisbecos of her staff. “They are a very good group.”

Bisbecos also noted that as part of ISDH, the Helpline is strategically located near many of the programs on which it offers information, such as WIC, and the Maternal and Children’s Special Health Care Services.

“We are surrounded by experts, which makes this Helpline truly unique,” she said.